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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ BACKTRACKS ON SNITCH LAW

REF: A. CARACAS 000767  
[1](#)B. CARACAS 000751  
[1](#)C. CARACAS 000653

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR VERONICA TORRES,  
REASON 1.4 (D)

[1](#)1. (SBU) In response to widespread and growing domestic and international criticism, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez announced on June 7 that the new Law of Intelligence and Counterintelligence would be revised. In a speech to members of his party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), Chavez said that "mistakes" were made, and that the law would be rewritten to address concerns about threats to human rights. Of particular concern to many Venezuelans was a provision that threatened prison sentences for citizens who refused to cooperate with the country's intelligence services. The law was enacted by decree on May 28 under powers granted to Chavez by the National Assembly. There was no public notice or debate on the law before it was put into effect.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Shortly after the May 28 decree, public outcries over threats to human and civil rights and free speech dominated the local press. Private media reaction to the law was uniformly negative. The Catholic Church also made clear its opposition in a strongly worded statement made by Cardinal Jorge Urosa that the law would, "restrict human rights consecrated in the Constitution." Opposition leaders and NGOs applauded Chavez' decision to draw back the spy law.

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COMMENT  
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[1](#)3. (C) This is the latest in a series of tactical retreats by Chavez. In the wake of the uproar following the RCTV closure and the referendum loss on December 2, 2007, he has reversed himself several times in order to assuage public opinion and cut his losses on losing issues. While he has retracted unpopular measures in years past, the postponement of the implementation of the Bolivarian school curriculum, the recent Venezolana de Television (VTV) reversal on television signal usage fees, and Chavez' recent recommendation to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to release their hostages and end their campaign are all examples of how much pressure he is under. Chavez' valuing of political expediency over ideology appears to be designed to improve his standing among the Venezuelan electorate in the run-up to the November 2008 gubernatorial and mayoral elections.

Downes